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ABSTRACT

The nature of violence and civility were explored from sociological and philosophical perspectives to contextualize violence and civility in terms of their implications for the theory and practice of adult education. The exploration focused on the following topics: (1) the nature of violence and civility and their relevance to contemporary realities; (2) the nature of violence in relation to the problem of good and evil; and (3) the question of whether the "axis of evil" is myth or reality. The terrorism of September 11th was deemed a form of violence that, although illegitimate, was justifiable by those who committed it for the purpose of interrupting civil order in the United States. It was argued that our best hope for counteracting the evil that led to the violence of the September 11th attacks lies in working to transform life through active participation in a civil society. Adult education was seen as a vehicle for nurturing transformation of life by actively engaging individuals in thinking and acting according to constructive powers of reason. Adult educators were urged to think and act wisely and to exercise their transformative powers. (14 references) (MN)

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On the Problems of Violence and Civility: Rethinking Transformative Powers of Adult Education

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Abstract: This paper presents sociological and philosophical investigations on the nature of violence and civility. The purpose of this research is to address and locate violence and civility in the context of September 11th terrorism in America. The paper intends to define the meaning of this event and to demonstrate the implications of the research for the theory and practice of transformative adult education.

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The purpose of this research is threefold: (1) to review selected sources on the nature of violence and civility and to demonstrate their relevance to contemporary realities, (2) to investigate the nature of violence in relation to the problem of good and evil, and (3) to contextualize violence and civility in terms of implications for the theory and practice of adult education. To achieve the above goals, I employ conceptual, descriptive analyses and problem posing. I consult widely acclaimed authors on the subject (see References). Additionally, I use language analysis of selected university students' essays written in response to terrorism in America. The use of language analysis in this paper is partial due to space limitations. Full analysis of the linguistic data and its results were presented outside the content of this paper. My appeal to language has a special implication. "Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula" (Saussure, 1966, p. 112). This paper attempts to capture the meanings of the concepts under discussion by paying a close attention to the ways of linguistic expression. Merriam & Simpson (1995) refer to linguistic analysis in relation to analytic philosophy, which uses "human language as its data base" (p. 88). My use of language analysis is limited to the domains of semantics (meaning of words) and pragmatics (language in use). I believe that "words are actions" (Collingwood, 1992). There is a direct relation between the power of a written or spoken word and the power of transformative action. Through speech and action combined we can express ourselves as unique individuals. This paper presents individual voices of thinkers and ordinary citizens to support the argumentative discourse of violence and civility. Among other sources, I use citations from students' essays coded as references with a capital letter "R" and a number as it appears on a certain essay, for example: "R1," "R13," etc.

This paper is an appeal to reason and its constructive powers and an outrage against violence. Violence is of human making. Violence manifests itself in the all-too-human ways, and "it is surely the case that all disciplines must cooperate in investigating and exploring violence toward the end of understanding and explaining it" (Stanage, 1975, p. xv). This task seems to be imperative for adult education today. Some important goals of adult education are to enhance, change, and empower individual lives and to allow for personal and societal transformation. These goals, in my mind, require a deeper insight into the nature of power expressed through faculties of action.

The title of this research bears important implications for adult education. "Re-thinking" is our ability to think again and gain, to think anew, to think well and to act wisely as opposed to irrational and destructive modes of thought and action. Thinking is a "re-thinking, recalling, remembering, memorizing, and responding to an original call coming from the central living presencing of the being of the world. Rethinking calls for the complete opening of the human spirit; the possibilities of uncovering the truth of being, letting us find in it a real dwelling place" (Heidegger, 2001, p. xiv). Since

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September 11th, many of us have been seeking a real dwelling place in the context of a "new normal." This paper is a call for rethinking a living presence of our being in the world, where a human faculty of action can be exercised in unpredictable and often destructive ways. By addressing the complex dialectics of power, adult education can respond to individual and societal needs and can inspire transformative actions. I think that something must and will be done to carry on the work of creating a more peaceful and constructive environment in which adult education will continue and thrive.

On Violence and Civility: Discussion.

"It was like watching a movie. But this movie you could not turn off and go home to your normal life. Life was no longer the same after the September 11th tragedies" (R24). On September 11th, 2001, violence took a concrete form of terrorism in the United States. The event has found its expression in the rhetoric with strong connotations. The words such as "evil" and "barbarism" continue to be widely used in media, officially and non-officially, by the political right and left. "A few Americans on the right and left have suggested that we brought the horror on ourselves—by which they mean, not just that we were unprepared, but that the terrorism is retribution for our own evil. Some members of the religious right see the attacks as the result of our nation's decaying personal morality. Left-leaning members of the press see them as a response to U.S. imperialism and unjust economic policies. The terrorists would readily agree with both claims" (Hibbs, 2001, p. B15). However valid such arguments might be, they do not fully explain the roots of violence or evil. Throughout the history of humankind violence has played an enormous role in human affairs, yet "the problems of violence still remain very obscure" (Sorel, 1941, p. 60). Sorel defines violence as a "manifestation of a return to barbarism" (p. 205). Sorel justifies proletariat violence, which, if "carried on as a pure and simple manifestation of the sentiment of the class war, appears as a very fine and very heroic thing" (p. 99). Girvetz (1975) asserts that violence inspired by a certain ideology can initiate the breakdown of an unjust system (e.g., revolutionary violence). Girvetz (1975) defines terrorism as a form of ideological violence, a "technique for bringing about social change which relies on the action of heroic, if romantically messianic, individuals, rather than on mass action" (p. 189). Osama bin Laden appears to be such a heroic and messianic leader and his terrorist acts as serving a particular ideology and a cause of justice for those behind him. We should not be misled by assumptions that terrorism is an act of insanity, for violence is "instrumental by nature" and "rational to the extent that it is effective in reaching the end that must justify it" (Arendt, 1963, p. 79). Violence can be justifiable, but it can never be legitimate. The practice of violence changes the world, "but the most probable change is to a more violent world" (Arendt, 1970, p. 80).

Arendt (1970) explores violence against the background of the twentieth century, "which has become a century of wars and revolutions, hence a century of that violence which is currently believed to be their common denominator" (p. 3). We can only guess what the outcomes of the 21st century could be. The questions of violence inevitably involve related phenomena, such as power, strength, force, and authority. To Arend (1970), these are "but words to indicate the means by which man rules over man; they are held synonyms because they have the same function" (p. 43). Arendt further points to semantic differences between power, strength, and force. Power, for instance, is "never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only as long as the group keeps together"; strength is "an individual entity"; force "should be reserved for the 'forces of nature' or the 'force of circumstances,' that is, to indicate the energy released by physical or social movements" (p. 45). Arendt argues that violence can destroy power and that the rule by violence "comes into play where power is being lost" (p. 53). Arendt asserts that the amount of violence "at the disposal of any given country may soon not be reliable indication of the country's strength or a reliable guarantee

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against destruction by a substantially smaller and weaker power" (p. 10). The above claims can be clearly applied to September 11th terrorism. Compare, for example, Afghanistan ("substantially weaker power"), a training ground for terrorists, which challenged the United States ("substantially stronger power") with violent actions. To extend on Arendt's claims, we can assume that a certain amount of democratic power (decline of general public interest and participation in a body politic) is being lost in America, and the loss of democratic power usually produces a "weakening" effect.

Ambivalence of power is one of the most elaborate and interesting points in Arendt's political philosophy, from which adult education can benefit substantially. Power can serve any cause and can be used and justified to achieve the most destructive ends. Power can also represent our best hope—our ability to act constructively and to sustain the realm of human affairs. Arendt (1958) appeals to the ancient ideal of genuine political life expressed through the notion of *vita activa*, which designates "action" as a human condition and a faculty of being engaged in the affairs of *polis*. *Vita activa* is exemplified in *bios politikos*—"the life devoted to the matters of *polis*, the realm of human affairs, stressing the action, *praxis*, needed to establish and sustain it" (p. 13). *Bios politikos* rises out of action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*). It is through great words and great deeds that humans can sustain democracy, the power of citizens. The metaphor of *polis*, in my mind, can be translated into a truly democratic civil society and an indispensable role it can play in helping Americans to return to their dwelling places in the reality of a "new normal."

Collingwood's (1992) political theory offers another ideal of genuine democracy, the ideal of civility, which he understands as the absence of force in our relations with others. To Collingwood, violence is a counterpart of civility. Violence is barbarism, "hostility towards civilization" (p. 342). Barbarism is a turning against civilization. Civilization is a "creation of the mind, the intellectual process of rendering something civil, or the process of becoming civil, or the state of being civil. Civilization is something which happens to a community" (p. 283). The essence of civilization is civility. The ideal of civility can only be approximated because of the existence of "non-social" (e.g., criminal) elements in a given society, which will require the use of force. Given that there will always be instances of non-agreements and conflicts within a body politic, we can deal with such instances "*dialectically*: that is by a process leading from non-agreement to agreement; or they may be dealt with *eristically*, that is, by hardening non-agreement into disagreement and settling the disagreement by a victory of one party over the other" (p. 229). To maintain an orderly and civilized life, we must live dialectically, that is, to convert every occasion of non-agreement into an occasion of agreement. Civilization means "*coming to obey rules of civil intercourse*" (p. 291). Law and order, peace and plenty are features of civilized life. The rule of law insures justice. Collingwood's principle of social justice entails the elimination of force from one's relations with other people. The more civilized a body politic the less economic exploitation there will be. The members of ideally civilized communities are "free agents," "agents possessing and exercising free will," agents who are "conscious of freedom" and who "recognize the freedom of others" (p. 309). In other words, what makes every community a truly civilized community is that its members share "social consciousness" (or "will"), which "involves the consciousness of freedom" (p. 139). Collingwood's version of a perfected social contract theory is worthy of regard for Americans trying to readjust to their lives after September 11th. An ideal of social justice is part of American democracy, yet it still remains inaccessible to large segments of American population.

Based on the above discussion, violence and civility appear as counterparts. Both violence and civility are instrumental and rational by nature, both are related to the human condition and the faculty of action. Violence and civility can be expressed through power, strength, force, and authority in different ways and by a different means for different purposes. Human beings are free agents who are

capable of undertaking violent and civil actions with the purpose to change the world. While civil action is constructive and positive, violent action makes the world more violent. Violence is justifiable, but it is illegitimate. Conflicts and disagreements can be resolved dialectically or eristically. September 11th terrorism can be defined as a form of violence, a breakdown of civility within and outside the US borders. Current war on terrorism is a justifiable and legitimate action undertaken by an international community to restore a civil order. *Bios politikos* is a way to sustain a body politic. It also could be a solution for both internal and external problems in a given society.

Related to the questions of civility are the concepts of citizenship and civil conscience. Who is a good citizen? Who is a good person? "I never spent much time in thought about my country or about my role as an American citizen. No one, myself included, could understand how others could hate America and Americans so much" (R23). Similar statements are among the most frequently cited in the texts I have collected for this research analysis. They express the sentiments of Americans who have never encountered evil of September 11th magnitude. Many Americans do not seem to fully understand the nature of evil and the amount of hatred behind the terrorist attacks. It is therefore helpful to extend the discussion on violence. Collingwood (1992) reminds us that barbarism and civilization, peace and war are creations of *mind*. Collingwood thoroughly examines the world history of barbarism in different times and civilizations, including Christian Europe and Middle Eastern Manichaeism. It appears that the minds of people of different cultures tend to create different visions of good and evil. In Manichaeism, for instance, good and evil are equal and opposite. In Christianity, "good is stronger and older than evil. The struggle between good and evil, which both believe to be real, is for the Manichee a struggle that can never have an ending; for the Christian it must end in the victory of the good. From this pregnant principle many consequences arise" (p. 360). The following discussion will focus on one of such consequences—the rhetoric of "the axis of evil" and its implications.

"Axis of Evil": Myth or Reality?

"The two *opposing* values 'good and bad,' 'good and evil' have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years; and though the latter value has certainly been on top for a long time, there are still places where the struggle is as yet undecided" (Nietzsche, 2000, p. 489). The struggle seems to be no less fierce today. Over the centuries, especially in the West, humans believed that the powers of reason would sustain their progress and would allow them to pursue a vision of the good, to create cultures and civilizations. "The crisis of modernity manifested in the events like Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and My Lai [...] seem to have destroyed the possibility of belief in any kind of vision of the good" (Rubinoff, 1975, p. 77). September 11th terrorism is yet another mark of the end of modernity. Do we indeed live in the age of apocalyptic uncertainty? Rubinoff (1975) ties apocalyptic feelings with the eclipse of reason—a radical departure from "the vision of the good." Man still "remains in essence a barbarian" (p. 75). Human reason is "the source of man's dignity and freedom" and "the source of his perversity and servitude to passion" (p. 79). This paradox of reason can be explained by the very constitution of man qua man. The most dramatic representation of the paradox of reason is the myth of Satan. According to the myth, humans create an external source of evil. The myth of Satan places evil at the center of a cosmic drama. Evil "originates in the conscious submission to an external compulsion; an act which is undertaken by consciousness in order to facilitate a flight from the primordial reality of one's own nature" (Rubinoff, 1975, p. 92). This is the flight from freedom and responsibility, and the flight from reality. Satan is the tempter who calls forth the beast in man. Satan is represented as a major player in the cosmic drama of good and evil, so "the enactment of violence if often legitimized by being presented as the fulfillment of a cosmic destiny" (Rubinoff, 1975, p. 85). Rubinoff argues that repressed societies are more likely to support this mythology. However, myths

based on the justification violent actions can be found in the most advanced societies and cultures. The "savage war" against Indians, legal sanctions and violent actions against immigrants, black people, labor-union members, and "Reds" are some examples of mythologically justifiable violence in American history. "We invoke our myths to help us begin to function again—and they work often enough for us to continue believing in them. The danger in our present use of myth is that our myths of choice may be so at odds with reality that their imperatives can never be fulfilled" (Slotkin, 2001, p. B11).

The expression of "the axis of evil" and the war on terrorism might invoke a myth of Satan, in which Satan "represents the idea of evil as a foreign intrusion into what is otherwise a world of pure virtue" (Rubinoff, 1975, p. 86). In the myth of Satan, violence appears as a species of evil. If God is being, them Devil non-being, "nothing," "no body," a mere myth, and "because of this, he can be 'any body.' He exists for 'no-purpose' and for 'no-reason.' And for this reason he can serve any purpose and give the appearance of being reasonable when he is in fact destroying reason" (Rubinoff, 1975, p. 110). The myth exemplifies existential and psychological ambivalence of the nature of consciousness with its tendency to flee from reality through a variety of forms of violence. Violence is rooted in the human condition as such. The flight from responsibility originates from the same source as man's creative powers. "Man is qua man the creative rebel who seeks through rebellion to re-create reality. Sometimes the re-creation of reality leads to a Promethean revelation of truth, as in the case of art. Sometimes, however, rebellion is simply counterfeit creativity, seeking not to reveal the truth, but to facilitate an escape from freedom" (Rubinoff, 1975, p. 114). Primordial nature of man reveals the fact that consciousness can also resist the retreat from reason. Promethean spirit can represent our best hope. On September 11th, we confronted the reality of evil. We also saw the reality of heroism, courage, and nobility in the face of terrifying death. "That is the testimony to how evil sometimes undermines itself: by generating astonishing acts of virtue" (Hibbs, 2001, p. B15).

Conclusions. Implications for Adult Education

Terrorism of September 11th can be defined as a form of violence, illegitimate, but justifiable by those who commit it, with the purpose to interrupt a civil order of American polis. Terrorism is a species of evil that manifests itself through the ambivalent nature of human consciousness endowed with both destructive and creative powers. Evil and violence are of human creation. We are free to flee from or take responsibility for our actions. Action is undertaken to change the world, and it can change it for good or ill. Human reason has the power to resist the flight from reality and freedom. Our best hope is *vita activa*—transformation of life through active participation in civil society. It can be nurtured through adult education. I believe that our actions can be guided by "the vision of the good." This vision appears to me as an active engagement of individuals in thinking and acting according to constructive powers of reason. "Even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, and that such illumination may well come from the uncertain, flickering, and often weak light that some men and women, in their lives and their works, will kindle under almost all circumstances and shed over the time span that was given them on earth" (Arendt, 1968, p. ix). We, too, have the right to expect some illumination coming from the light of adult educators, women and men, who devote their lives to *vita activa*. We can certainly take a personal responsibility to resist the flight from reality and reason. We can choose creativity over destruction. Not all hope is lost. "The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born" (Arendt, 1958, p. 247).

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The faculty of action is ontologically rooted in adult education. Adult educators are capable of thinking well and acting wisely, and exercising their transformative powers.

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